

Amendments To The Claims:

1. (Currently amended) A loading apparatus for loading a self-expanding stent into a catheter delivery system in combination with a crimping apparatus for reducing the diameter of said self-expanding stent from a first diameter to a second diameter prior to loading said self-expanding stent into said catheter delivery system, said crimping apparatus comprising at least three coupled, movable blades which form an aperture whose size may be varied, said loading apparatus having an alignment plug with a tapered portion for matingly engaging a tapered portion of an actuation hub of said crimping apparatus.

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Previously presented) The loading apparatus of claim 1, wherein the mating engagement of said tapered portions provides for coaxial self-alignment between a lumen of the loading apparatus and a crimping chamber of said crimping apparatus.

4. (Currently amended) An apparatus for loading a medical device into a catheter delivery system, the apparatus constructed and arranged to matingly engage a crimping apparatus having a crimping chamber for reducing the diameter of said medical device from a first diameter to a second diameter prior to loading said medical device into said catheter delivery system;

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the apparatus comprising an introducer shaft having an internal lumen for receiving an outer catheter shaft of said catheter delivery system, the introducer shaft comprising an introducer plug having a lumen through which the medical device is introduced, wherein the lumen of said introducer plug tapers from an opening having a larger diameter at an opening of the introducer shaft to an opening having a smaller diameter for engaging said outer catheter shaft, and wherein the mating engagement between said apparatus and said crimping apparatus provides for coaxial self-alignment between said internal lumen and said crimping chamber.

5-7. (Cancelled)

8. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim [[7]] 4 wherein said introducer plug has a length which is slightly less than the length of a stent strut.

9. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim [[6]] 4 wherein said introducer plug is modular with said introducer shaft.

10. (Currently amended) The apparatus of claim [[6]] 4 wherein said introducer plug has conical flanged edges extending from said opening for engaging an outer catheter shaft.